

The Guest Room by geneticsnerd

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Summary: Jonathan and Nancy are fed up with themselves, and Bauman's lecture forces them to show their hands. First fic.

1. Trust Issues

Chapter 1: Trust Issues

Jonathan couldn't get comfortable on the thin pullout mattress, but it had less to do with the springs and more to do with the thoughts racing through his head following Bauman's unsolicited advice to him and Nancy. What did Bauman know about him and Nancy, anyway? It's not like they'd had any significant contact with him before showing up at his house earlier today. He was just full of vodka and spouting bullshit like he was some smug, omnipotent couple's counselor. Jonathan sat cross legged on the bed, unable to think straight while stretched out on the bed. Jonathan didn't have trust issues, and even if he did, he certainly had ample reason to distrust others his age. It had always been easier for him to intentionally isolate himself from others his age than to try and overcome the established creep label he'd been branded with in middle school. And even before that, his baggy secondhand clothing had set him apart from the other kids before he'd ever had a chance to make friends. It was better this way. He didn't have to please anyone but himself, and he had no distractions from his family, who needed him more than ever since Mom had kicked Dad to the curb, especially Will. Money was tight, and he justified his solitary behavior by picking up extra shifts at the record store and developing his only outlet, photography. Okay, maybe he had trust issues.

Did he still want those walls he had put up between himself and the rest of the world? He had hesitantly let them down last year for Nancy, the first and only person who expressed concern for him when Will went missing. It was nice to have someone to talk to that wasn't Mom or Will; more than nice. It dawned on him that if he had enjoyed spending time with Nancy, his isolation from her over the last year hadn't been some voluntary separation from people that meant nothing to him; he had just been scared. He wouldn't let himself believe that Nancy had actually wanted to be around him and convinced himself that their brief friendship had been one of convenience, simply a byproduct of the rest of the world crashing in around them. In short, he hadn't trusted himself to be around someone like her, and he hadn't trusted Nancy enough to let her get

close to him. Maybe he was just as fucked up as Bauman said. He let out the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and reached over to shut off the lamp next to the couch.

Johnathan lay back with his hands behind his head to stare at the darkened, unfinished wood ceiling above him, the only light coming in through the crack beneath the door. Was he really willing to risk his friendship with Nancy to see if she felt the same? And what about Steve? Just minutes ago, she had claimed (albeit unconvincingly) that he loved him. She was still with him, even if things had seemed tense between them at the party the other night. He felt a sudden flash of anger towards Steve – regardless of whatever Nancy might have said to Steve that night, deserting his clearly intoxicated girlfriend at a party was totally irresponsible and unacceptable. Jonathan shuddered to think of what could have happened to Nancy in a house full of drunk high school jocks if he hadn't been there to take her home. Hawkins High already considered Nancy to be a slut after the encounter between Jonathan and Steve last year, and her only defense from being harassed and propositioned by the sexually stunted meatheads of Hawkins had been her relationship with 'King Steve.' She must have felt something for Steve, given the ease with which she had gone back to him, but Jonathan thought there had been something different about her behavior towards him too. They'd clearly had some kind of connection after last year, stealing glances at one another in the hallways, only to let their eyes flit away nervously when they'd been caught. Maybe she was just staring at him the same way everyone else did; after all, they had simply resumed their posts as class creep and suburban princess when Will had been returned to them and the Demogorgon disintegrated along with Eleven. Maybe he was just 'The Creep' to her.

But hadn't Nancy all but admitted to having feelings for him at the motel last night? She had waited for him. It hadn't even felt real to hear those words from across the divide between their beds, and it had sent a thrill up his spine before he had ruined it. Jonathan groaned and smothered his face with a pillow at the memory of his asinine response to her confession. Jesus Christ, he was a moron – no wonder he had no friends. She had been perfectly within her rights to figuratively and literally turn her back on him after that. Was it all on Nancy to keep their friendship going after everything that had

happened? Sure, he had a responsibility to be there for Will while he recovered from his time in the Upside Down, and that had been a significant task, but he'd certainly have been able to drop by the Wheeler residence or give her a call. Even just keeping up with her at school would have been sufficient. The truth was that he was more comfortable pretending that the ball was in her court than sticking his neck out to preserve a friendship (or whatever it was) that meant a lot to him. He was a coward.

Jonathan sat up almost violently in the darkness of the study. He couldn't let it happen again; He was done being a coward and wouldn't let Nancy slip through his fingers this time if he could help it. He had to talk to her. He needed to know what she felt, what she wanted from him. Flipping on the lamp to the left of the pullout, Jonathan swung his legs over the edge of the mattress, the concrete floor cold against his bare feet. He steeled himself for a moment before walking to the sliding metal door to enter the living room.

He jumped upon seeing Nancy already walking towards the study, in the same short, pink nightgown she had worn the night before, her hair in loose curls around her face. Her sudden appearance spooked him, and he lost his resolve. She spoke first, seeming equally surprised to see him up and about. They greeted each other quickly and awkwardly, Jonathan swinging his arms back and forth to try and hide his nervousness. Surely, he couldn't have this conversation with her now, not with a long and potentially very uncomfortable drive back to Hawkins tomorrow.

"I just, uh... I... I just wanted to say that..." she began cautiously, speaking in a low voice, nearly a whisper. Jonathan was pretty sure he knew what she was going to say and interrupted her before she could continue.

"Oh no, don't. I mean – he's so drunk." Jonathan knew this was true – Bauman had thrown back more vodka than the two of them combined. He had become more obnoxious and outspoken with each sip. This didn't, however, mean that Bauman was incorrect.

She nodded her head in agreement. "Wasted," she nervously confirmed, a small smile on her face. She too seemed like she had been dwelling on Bauman's words.

"Yeah." He was relieved that their conversation was not veering into uncharted territory, even while kicking himself for not being straightforward with her as he'd intended when he left the study. "I mean, what? He knows us for a couple hours and he has us all figured out?" Jonathan crossed his arms, partially from the cool air and Nancy nodded earnestly, clearly on the same page about Bauman's overstepping.

She took a deep breath and responded slowly, with a touch of trepidation. "God. Okay, yeah. I feel... I'm glad we feel the same way." She grabbed her collar while she talked, like she needed an outlet to fidget. Jonathan couldn't even look her in the eyes and kept his own glued to the floor except for the occasional glance at Nancy. He was afraid that he would see honest relief in her face, that she really didn't feel anything for him. He wasn't sure if he could handle such a letdown, keyed up as he was already. He still had his arms crossed over his chest, as if he could block out his own self-hatred for not being open with her.

"Yeah... yeah, it's fine." But Jonathan knew it wasn't fine. He was allowing her to return to the guestroom without giving him the answers he left the study to get. If he took this conversation at face value, it appeared that they had squared it all away and there was nothing left to say. But he didn't feel satisfied; he could feel the tension between them as they locked eyes in the dim light. He hoped to god he wasn't imagining it.

Nancy broke the seemingly eternal silence. "So, uh, goodnight... I guess." She stated it with a sliver of ambivalence, like she was only acting according to their awkward script and not her own free will. That 'I guess' told him all he needed to know. Nancy could feel that this conversation wasn't really over as well, whether that was because of her own feelings or because she could sense his, he didn't know. He could feel her eyes on him, analyzing his every move, returning his own intense gaze.

"Yeah, um, goodnight." She was clearly ending their chat, and Jonathan was almost as relieved as he was furious with himself. He backed towards the study like he was on autopilot, somewhat against his will. He watched her turn around and return to the guest room, closing the door silently. He had allowed himself to chicken out

again.

Jonathan threw himself dejectedly back down onto the pullout. How many times would they come so close to finally talking about what they both knew had to be said? He turned off the lamp and lay on his back, rubbing the palms of his hands into his closed eyes until he saw fireworks of color behind his eyelids.

Fucking coward.

2. Retreat

Chapter 2: Retreat

Nancy closed the door to the guest room quietly so as to prevent Bauman from knowing he had gotten under their skin. She crossed carefully to the bed and leaned against the wall to process her thoughts following her encounter with Jonathan. She had done enough thinking since Bauman left them to know that he was right: She had retreated to the familiarity of her old life. She had taken the easy route instead of the one she really wanted, because pursuing a relationship with Jonathan would ultimately mean accepting the truth that the world was not as it seemed. Bauman was right, she *did* like Steve, a lot – He was a really good guy, and in spite of some of his faults, he was a fun person to be around. Though he had initially been unwelcome in the Byers home when they set the trap for the Demogorgon, he proved himself to be a formidable ally. But Nancy didn't love Steve, she knew that now. Her discontent with the status quo following Will's return and the death of the Demogorgon had been building slowly, finally coming to a head at the party last week. Steve had wanted a night to act like they were just normal teenagers, and while she had indulged him, her patience and conscience had been wearing away for a long time.

Nancy hugged her pillow closer to her body. Why was everyone content to act like Barb's disappearance had never happened? While the rest of Hawkins could claim ignorance of her death and Will's abduction, she, Steve, and Jonathan knew better. How could they attend a party like this while Barb's body still lay in the Upside Down of the library, her parents still searching in vain? In the days since the party, Nancy realized that the reason she'd been so adamant that Jonathan also attend with them was that she wanted someone else there who wasn't content to drink away the memory of what had happened to them in the fall of 1983. This motive had ultimately failed her though, as the only way she had been able to stomach the ignorant self-indulgence of the party was to drink herself stupid. She felt awful for snapping at Steve, he didn't really deserve her wrath. He was dealing with the knowledge of lethal trans-dimensional beasts in his own way – He found comfort in resuming his ordinary life, in

returning to the banality of everyday concerns rather than dwelling on the terrifying nature of their universe, but she just couldn't do the same.

She wished she had recognized this conflict of interest in the beginning, but she felt so lost about her own identity after those events that she desperately latched onto any semblance of normalcy. It was true, she had waited for Jonathan, but she hadn't taken any steps to keep him in her life. It was simpler to resume her position as 'King Steve's' docile, 4.0 GPA girlfriend. But she just couldn't do it anymore - she was sure of what she wanted now, *who* she wanted. Nancy was done hiding behind Steve and her old life, the one that had been irrevocably stolen from her when she had learned of alternate dimensions filled with otherworldly predators and lost her best friend. She felt like her life could be cleanly divided into two chapters: before and after she had taped together the photograph of Barb's final moments in this plane of existence. Nancy didn't even feel like a teenager anymore; She had handled a gun, set a fire trap for a deadly monster, and helped harbor an escaped government test subject. She couldn't and wouldn't go back to worrying about her test scores and kissing the asses of the popular girls. She wanted to stop running away.

So why had she retreated yet again? Did she doubt her feelings for Jonathan? No, she knew that he was right for her. He had always been on the same page as her in the aftermath of the Demogorgon. He shared her looming fear for the future, persistent memories of the past, and fervent desire for justice. Whenever she had doubted herself while trying to expose Hawkins Laboratory, he had been next to her to encourage her and assist in developing their plan of attack, even putting his own neck on the line for her agenda. She admired him deeply for his intelligence, kindness, and responsibility for his family. In all of the ways that Steve was a vibrant teenager, Jonathan was a respectable young man. He was thoughtful, mature, and responsible. He didn't talk much, but when he did, it was always insightful and worth hearing. She had somewhat selfishly considered him to be marked as her own, figuratively and physically, though she hadn't consciously entertained these thoughts while she was with Steve. Even though she had felt their incompatibility, she could never have betrayed him in that way.

Even during their jittery chat just minutes ago, she had felt the draw Jonathan held for her. Though they had seen each other in pajamas before, and even shared a bed, Bauman's insight had dissolved the layer of protection that had existed between them. It felt far more intimate in the low light of the living room, in spite of sleeping further away from one another than they ever had before when spending the night together. She had marveled at the way his gray shirt fell over his shoulders and abdomen before he crossed his arms over his chest. Nancy had feared for a moment that she had been caught staring, but he had been staring at the ground. Jonathan was an attractive guy, and more muscular than one would expect when not layered in baggy clothing. Did she love him? She was hesitant to use such a profound and final word, but she knew that she had never felt this way about anyone else.

So, did she doubt Jonathan's feelings for her? She was less certain of his own affection for her, but still fairly convinced. She had caught him gazing at her before, in the hallways and classrooms of Hawkins High, before he quickly pretended to be focused on something else. She was confident that he had spotted her doing the same to him. No, she was not afraid that he wouldn't reciprocate her affections. She realized after a moment that their communications recently had been so stilted that to her knowledge, Jonathan didn't even know that she and Steve were no longer together.

Nancy glared frustratedly at the patterned drapes on the doors that separated her and Jonathan. Maybe it went back to what Bauman said – Nancy feared for her reputation. The period last year when everyone had believed that she cheated on Steve with Jonathan had been mortifying. She chewed on her fingernails anxiously the memory of the graffiti and her treatment by her classmates. She also knew that some people still thought she had, in spite of the borderline friendly interactions between Steve and Jonathan. Was she afraid of being Nancy 'the slut' Wheeler again if she were to be publicly attached to him? Did she really care if her vapid, oblivious classmates thought she was nuts for having feelings for 'the creep?' No, she could never be ashamed of Jonathan, with his relentless kindness, bravery, and understanding. He wasn't a creep, he was just introspective and valued his privacy. It hurt her for a moment to wonder if Jonathan believed that was why she hadn't pursued him, or

worse, if her preserving her reputation was the reason he hadn't called her last year. He deserved to be pursued and desired.

Nancy couldn't sit on this bed any longer if there was any possibility that he believed that she didn't want him. She had failed him again by retreating to the safety of their strange, distant admiration when she had the opportunity to clear the air. She needed him to know that he wasn't just an emotional crutch for her; she *wanted* Jonathan, in every sense of the word. She tossed her pillow from her lap and clamored off the rickety mattress. She wouldn't wait a moment longer.

Nancy whipped open the door for the second time that evening, nearly running into Jonathan in her haste and surprise. They locked eyes for a moment, Jonathan's eyes burning into her own before he leaned in to capture her lips in a feverish kiss, his arm at her waist.

3. Cutting the Bullshit

Chapter 3: Cutting the Bullshit

They stepped back from Jonathan's kiss simultaneously, equally stunned by his action. He couldn't believe that he'd kissed her. He had gotten out of bed to finally talk to her, not force himself on her! When she opened the door, she had been so close, nearly running into him in her rush. He could swear he felt the heat of her body on his, and this coupled with their intense eye contact had flipped some switch inside him. Why had he done that?!

Jonathan was close to apologizing when he saw the flush of red on Nancy's cheeks, her wide eyes unabashedly burning into his. She had leaned into the kiss when she got over the shock of his forwardness, even rested her hand on his arm. It hit him like a ton of bricks – she wanted him too. Nancy's face mirrored the urgency and desperation that he felt coursing through his veins; it was like his entire body was on fire. She leaned towards him again incrementally, letting out a huff of air. This was ample encouragement for him to pull her close to him a second time, this time crushing her warm body against his own. It almost surprised him how small she was against his chest, with his arms around her.

Their lips met in a frenzied embrace, her hand at his cheek, fingers threaded into his hair. They kissed each other hungrily, like they needed each other more than they needed to breathe. Her lips parted slightly, allowing his tongue to meet hers, deepening their embrace. Nancy's other hand moved from his waist up to his back, seeking leverage to get even closer to him. Jonathan responded in kind, throwing his arm around her shoulders, but he couldn't get close enough to her to find any relief; he could feel himself hardening as the blood rushed south from his brain, her quick gasps between kisses fanning the flames. He threaded his fingers up through her hair to keep her close. She grabbed onto his shirt and pulled him into the guest room, and he eagerly followed, not breaking their kiss as he shut the door loudly behind them. He couldn't care less if Bauman heard the door slam.

At this point they had reached the limit of his knowledge. The closest

experience he had to this was making out in the Ohio woods with a girl who lived down the street from his grandparents in eighth grade. He'd been alone with Nancy in a bedroom before, and even spent the night in her bed, but not like this. Not with her hands yanking at his sleep shirt as he backed her against the doorframe. Her chilly hands mapped the expanse of his abdomen beneath his shirt, causing him to gasp against her mouth. She must have been laying awake thinking about their evasive discussion just as he had. Maybe she was headed to the study when he met her at the door to the guest room.

He wasn't sure what to do next and was perfectly content to allow her to take the lead, given his inexperience. Nancy tugged his shirt up, indicating that she wanted it off, and Jonathan pulled it the rest of the way over his head. The cool air of the room sizzled against his heated skin – no wonder her hands were cold. She took a moment to pull back and study him, running her hand from his cheek, to his neck, to his shoulder, to his chest. Her half-lidded eyes met his, causing his breath to hitch in his throat. God, he wanted her so badly. Nancy moved her hands back up behind his neck to pull him into another searing kiss. This time she rocked her hips toward his, grinding up against his erection through his thin pajama pants.

"Nancy," He choked out, pushing her away and shaking his head. She looked hurt but waited for him to catch his breath. "We have to stop. This is... we can't do this to Steve." Jonathan was panting, his eyes on the floor to avoid the disappointment in her eyes. They flew up a few moments later when he heard her quiet laughter, he looked at her amused face in confusion. She placed her hand against his cheek again.

"Jonathan, Steve and I broke up a few days ago, after the party. I'm sorry I didn't tell you, I wasn't sure how to bring it up." Nancy stood on her tiptoes, her mouth inches from his ear, her breath fluttering against his hair. "I'm all yours," she murmured softly.

That did it. Jonathan quickly returned his mouth to hers, groaning as she resumed her slow assault on his pajama pants. She pushed against his chest, and for a moment he believed she was putting an end to their unexpected tryst, but she returned her lips to his as she backed him up until his calves hit the mattress. She gently encouraged him to sit, and for a moment she stood in front of him

and just drank him in while he rested his hands on her hips. It also gave Jonathan a moment to grasp what was happening. He was shirtless, love drunk, sitting on her bed, with her standing between his knees and her hand on his chest, her lips red and plump from kissing him, and it was all real. He'd never admit it, but he had imagined being in a situation like this with her on more than one occasion, when he'd needed to relieve some stress and just wanted to forget that his brother had nearly been lost forever to a beast-laden alternate dimension. He blushed deeply at the thought, feeling somewhat embarrassed at his lack of restraint in thinking about his seemingly happily paired-off friend in such a way, but he supposed he knew better now.

Nancy pushed Jonathan further onto the bed, climbing up to straddle his lap and pushing herself flush against his chest to resume their kisses. He felt that her thighs were a safe place to touch her, not wanting to go too fast or outpace his own self-control; he was hoping that he could last long enough to make this good for her too, even though he really had no clue how to do that. Her impatient rocking against his pelvis was maddening, and he was starting to match her pace, pulling her hips closer to him to increase the friction. He needed to slow it down.

Jonathan leaned away slightly to catch his breath, and Nancy seemed to understand that he needed a change of focus. She halted her movement in his lap and shifted her hands to her collar to slowly unfasten the buttons, her eyes never straying from Jonathan's. He could hardly think as he watched her hands drop to the hem of her light pink gingham nightgown, fingering it for a moment before slowly pulling it over her head and tossing it to the floor, leaving her only in her underwear. He let out a small moan and glanced briefly at her small, rounded breasts, afraid that she might be offended if he openly ogled her. She was so beautiful, not that this was news to him. He had always considered her to be an attractive girl, even more so after he had gotten to know her personally. But he was at a loss now, unsure of the next steps and unwilling to make a move he was unsure of.

"Nancy," Jonathan breathed in a low whisper, "I've never done this before." He was pretty sure she had guessed as much already, but he

still half expected her to recoil in surprise or irritation. He felt ashamed after a moment for thinking that she could be so shallow, when he knew her to be a sweet and understanding girl. He had no reason not to trust her after all they'd been through.

Nancy smiled warmly, running her hand through the hair at nape of his neck and sighing deeply. She seemed to sense his reticence, displaying her innate ability to see right through him. She caressed his right hand lightly before slowly moving it from her hip up to her perky breast. She caught his eyes before responding gently, "That's okay, I'll help you."